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The Treatise on the Egyptian Pyramids (Tuhfat al-kirām fī khabar al-ahrām)

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Isis*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Feb., 1939), pp. 17-37

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of [The History of Science Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/225578>

Accessed: 08/12/2011 19:20

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The Treatise on the Egyptian Pyramids

(*Tuhfat al-kirām fī khabar al-ahrām*)

by JALĀL AL-DĪN AL-SUYŪTĪ

Edited,

with introduction, translation, and notes (*).

The work here presented is one of an enormous number of minor compilations on an infinite variety of subjects, made by the famous Arab polyhistorian ABŪ AL-FADL 'ABD AL-RAHMĀN IBN ABĪ BAKR IBN MUḤAMMAD IBN ABĪ BAKR, known as JALĀL AL-DĪN AL-SUYŪTĪ, or for short JALĀL AL-SUYŪTĪ, who lived from 849/1445 to 911/1505. For a short biography of him and a list of his works see BROCKELMANN's *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, II, pp. 143-158; Supplement, II, pp. 178-198. The present work is found on p. 157, and p. 196 of Suppt., under the number 283.

Although BROCKELMANN, in common with other bibliographical sources, lists it as an independent work and the text itself gives no indication to the contrary, the treatise is really an enlarged redaction of the corresponding chapter in one of AL-SUYŪTĪ's major works, his history of Egypt entitled *Kitāb Husn al-muḥādara fī akhbār Miṣr wal-Qāhira*. Like most Arabic works on matters of antiquity, the treatise is predominantly composed of extracts

(*) For Arabic text order Document 1064 from American Documentation Institute, care of Science Service, 2101 Constitution Ave., Washington, D. C., remitting 40 cents for microfilm form; \$ 2.00 for photocopies readable without optical aid.

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from older writers, many of whom, in their turn, depended more or less upon still older authorities, without being too anxious to indicate the source of their information. AL-SUYŪTĪ, too, does not always name his authorities, and in one passage, at least, he is directly copying word for word from AL-DIMISHQĪ without saying a word about it. Such cases of direct plagiarism are fairly frequent in Arabic literature, and AL-SUYŪTĪ himself was often accused of it, with good reason.

The prose authorities whom AL-SUYŪTĪ indicates specifically by name are as follows (titles of works are given within parentheses) :

'ABD AL-RAHMĀN IBN 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'ABD AL-ḤAKAM, died 257/871. (*Futūh Miṣr*). BROCKELMANN, I, 148.

MUḤAMMAD IBN 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'ABD AL-ḤAKAM, the brother of the preceding, died 262/875. BROCKELMANN, II, 692.

ABŪ ZAYD AL-BALKHĪ, died 322/934. BROCKELMANN, I, 229.

ABŪ AL-ḤASAN 'ALĪ IBN AL-ḤUSAYN AL-MAS'ŪDĪ, died 345 or 346/956 or 957. (*Akhbār al-zamān wa-man abādahu 'l-hidhān*). BROCKELMANN, I, 144f.

MAHMŪD IBN 'UMAR AL-ZAMAKHSHARĪ, died 538/1143. (*Kitāb al-amkīna*). BROCKELMANN, I, 289ff.

'ABD AL-RAHĪM IBN 'ALĪ AL-'ASQALĀNĪ, called AL-QĀDĪ AL-FĀDIL, died 596/1199. BROCKELMANN, I, 316.

IBRĀHĪM IBN WĀŠIF SHĀH AL-MIṢRĪ AL-KĀTIB, 7th/13th century. BROCKELMANN, I, 335f.

DIYĀ' AL-DĪN MUHAMMAD IBN 'ABD AL-KARĪM IBN AL-ĀTHĪR, died 637-1239. (*Risālat al-azhār ?*). BROCKELMANN, I, 297.

SHAMS AL-DĪN ABŪ AL-MUZAFFAR YŪSUF SIBT IBN AL-JAWZĪ, died 654/-1257. (*Mir'āt al-zamān*). BROCKELMANN, I, 347.

'ALĪ IBN MŪSĀ IBN SA'ID AL-MAGHRIBĪ, died 673/1274 or 685/1286. (*Al-Mughrib fi hulā 'l-maghrib*). BROCKELMANN, I, 336f.

MUHAMMAD IBN IBRĀHĪM AL-KUTUBĪ, called AL-WAṬWĀT, died 718/1318. (*Mabāhij al-fikar*). BROCKELMANN, II, 55.

TĀJ AL-DĪN MUHAMMAD IBN 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB IBN AL-MUTAWWAJ AL-ZUBAYRĪ, died 730/1330. (*'Ajā'ib Miṣr*, presumably identical with, or an extract from his *Iqāz al-mutaghaffil wa-'tti'āz al-mutawassil*). HĀJJĪ KHALĪFA, I, 516; II, 146; III, 161.

AHMAD IBN YAḤYĀ IBN FAḌL ALLĀH, died 749/1348. (*Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amsār*). BROCKELMANN, II, 141.

IBN AL-MUNĀWĪ (perhaps identical with the Egyptian QĀDĪ YAḤYĀ IBN SA'D AL-DĪN AL-MUNĀWĪ, died 871/1466. BROCKELMANN, II, 77).

Two prose authors are quoted anonymously, viz. :

'ABD AL-LATĪF IBN YŪSUF AL-BAGHDĀDĪ, died 629/1231. (*Mukhtaşar 'ajā'ib Miṣr*). BROCKELMANN, I, 481.

SHAMS AL-DĪN MUHAMMAD AL-DIMISHQĪ, died 727/1327. (*Nukhbat al-dahr*). BROCKELMANN, II, 130.

To these might be added two traditionists, mentioned in the text, viz. :

'ABD ALLĀH IBN SHUBRUMA AL-KHUZĀ'Ī, died 144/761. IBN HAJAR, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, Hyderabad, 1325-27/1907-09, V, 250f.

SA'ID IBN 'UFAYR, died 226/841. AL-KINDĪ, *The governors and judges of Egypt*, éd. GUEST, p. 25f.

The poets quoted in the text are as follows :

AHMAD AL-MUTANABBĪ, died 354/965. BROCKELMANN, I, 86ff.

'ABD AL-WAHHĀB IBN AL-HASAN IBN JA'FAR IBN AL-HĀJIB, died 387/997. AL-MAQRIZĪ, *Das Pyramidenkapitel*, ed. GRAEFE, p. 44.

ABŪ AL-ṢALT UMAYYA IBN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ AL-ANDALUSĪ, died 529/1134. BROCKELMANN, I, 486f.

ZĀFIR AL-HADDĀD, died 529/1135. BROCKELMANN, I, 260.

'UMĀRA AL-YAMANI, died 569/1175. BROCKELMANN, I, 333f.

'ALĪ IBN MUHAMMAD IBN AL-SĀ'ĀTĪ, died 604/1207. BROCKELMANN, I, 256.

AHMAD IBN MUHAMMAD, called AL-SHIHĀB AL-MANSŪRĪ, died 887-1482.

AL-SUYŪTĪ, *Nazm al-iqyān*, ed. HITTI, p. 77ff.

SAYF AL-DĪN IBN JUBĀRA.

The text presented here is based on Cod. Landberg 359 of the Yale University Library, a modern (19th century) copy of 6 leaves, in fair naskhī, which was collated by the copyist with two other and undoubtedly much older mss. Variant readings were also obtained from the following mss. :

Berlin Staatliche Bibliothek. An incomplete copy (Ahlwardt 6112).

Through the courtesy of Bibliotheksrat Dr. WEISWEILER.

Gotha Herzogliche Bibliothek (Pertsch 1688): Through the courtesy of the director Dr. PAUL RICHTER and Dr. WEISWEILER.

Cambridge University Library. An incomplete copy (Browne 227). Through the courtesy of the curator Mr. GOODMAN and Professor STOREY.

The text of AL-SUYŪTĪ's *Husn al-muḥāḍara* was also compared, in the lithographed edition (Bulaq, about 1860), and the printed edition of Cairo, 1299/1882; both, however, present a very unsatisfactory text.

ABBREVIATIONS

- B The Berlin ms.
- C The Cambridge ms.
- G The Gotha ms.
- Y The Yale ms.
- H AL-SUYŪTĪ's *Kitāb Ḥusn al-muḥādara*.
- Hl The lithographed edition of the *Ḥusn*, Bulaq, about 1860.
- Hp The printed edition of the *Ḥusn*, Cairo, 1299/1882.
- M AL-MAQRIZI. *Das Pyramidenkapitel in al-Makrizi's "Hitat" ... herausgegeben und uebersetzt von Erich Graefe. Leipzig, 1911. (Leipziger semitistische Studien, V, 5).*
- ITB IBN TAGHRI BARDI. *Abu 'l-Mahasin 'Ibn Tagri Bardī Annales... Ediderunt T. G. J. Juynboll et B. F. Matthes. Lugduni Batavorum, 1852-61.*
- Yaq. YĀQŪT. *Jacut's Geographisches Wörterbuch... herausgegeben von F. Wuestenfeld. Leipzig, 1866-71.*
- D AL-DIMISHQI. *Cosmographie de Chems-ed-Din Abou Abdallah Mohammed ed-Dimichqui... publiée par A. F. Mehren. Saint-Pétersbourg, 1866.*
- AL 'ABD AL-LATĪF. *Abdollahiphi Compendium memorabilium Aegypti... edidit J. White. Tübinger, 1789.*
- IFA IBN FADL ALLĀH'S *Masālik al-absār*, ed. by AHMAD ZAKĪ Pāshā. Vol. I, Cairo, 1924.
- IAH IBN 'ABD AL-HAKAM. *The history of the conquest of Egypt... known as the Futūh Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam. Edited... by Charles C. Torrey. New Haven, 1922. (Yale oriental series. Researches, III).*

THE DELIGHT OF THE NOBLE CONCERNING
THE PYRAMIDS

composed by the accomplished scholar, the shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī—of whose blessings may God give us the benefit in both this world and the next. Praise be to God the lord of both worlds !

In the name of God, the merciful lord of compassion. May he bless our lord Muḥammad and his kin and companions and give them salvation. Praise be to God and peace upon His

servants whom He has chosen. I have entitled this essay “The delight of the noble concerning the Pyramids.”

IBN ‘ABD AL-HAKAM says in his “Conquest of Egypt”: According to some traditionists, the Pyramids were built at the time of SHADDĀD IBN ‘ĀD. However, I have found no informed person among the Egyptians who had any authentic information on the Pyramids, and that is what the poet alludes to when he says :

The Pyramids baffle the minds of men of intelligence,
And (the most extravagant) dreams become insignificant
compared with their magnitude.
Smooth, of triangular build, and lofty,
Arrows shot to their utmost distance fall short of them. (1)
I know not—since meditation stops short before them,
And conjecture is perplexed by their marvel—
Whether they are graves of heathen kings,
Talismans against the (ravages of the) sand, or monuments.

He (2) says : I think the Pyramids must have been built before the Deluge, for had they been built after it, men would have known something (definite) about them.

Several historians (3) say that the builder of the Pyramids was SAWRĪD, the son of SALYŪF, king of Egypt, who lived three hundred years before the Deluge. The cause of it was as follows : He dreamed that the earth had turned upside down over its inhabitants, men were thrown down on their faces, and the stars collapsed, crashing one against the other with terrific noise. This dream worried him, but he kept it to himself. Thereupon he dreamed again that the fixed stars had come down to earth in the shape of white birds, and kept seizing human beings and throwing them between two mighty mountains, which then slammed shut over them; all the while the luminous stars remained obscured. Awakening in terror, he assembled the chiefs

(1) ‘ABD AL-LATĪF (p. 53) says : In my presence a Bowman, who was with us, shot an arrow along the height of one of the Pyramids as well as along its width, and the arrow dropped at less than half of the distance (in both cases).

(2) Or rather, according to AL-MAQRIZI, his brother MUHAMMAD IBN ‘ABD AL-HAKAM.

(3) According to AL-MAQRIZI, this account is by IBRĀHĪM IBN WĀSIF SHĀH AL-KĀTİB.

of the priests from all the provinces of Egypt, to the number of one hundred and thirty priests, headed by their dean POLEMON (4) (IBLIMŪN). After he had narrated (his dreams) to them, they measured the elevation of the stars, and having done this fully and thoroughly, they deduced the fact of the impending Deluge. The king asked, "Will it reach our country also?" "Yes," said they, "and it will be devastated, and remain so for a number of years." Whereupon the king ordered the building of the Pyramids.

He had canals constructed within them, bringing the (water of the) Nile to a certain point and leading it on to points in the West and in Upper Egypt. He filled the Pyramids with talismans, wonderful things, riches, treasures, etc., and inscribed upon them the sayings of the wise men, including all the secret sciences, the names of drugs and their benevolent and injurious properties, the science of talismans, arithmetic, geometry, and medicine, all this explained (so as to be clear) to him who knew their writing and their languages.

When the king issued the order for the construction of the Pyramids, they hewed out giant columns and awe-inspiring stone-plates, and brought over blocks of rock from the region of Aswān, wherewith they built the foundations of the three Pyramids, binding them together with lead (solder) and iron (pins). They built the gates of the Pyramids forty cubits below the ground, and made the height of each Pyramid one hundred royal cubits, which is equal to five hundred of our cubits, such as we use today; each of their sides was made also one hundred royal cubits long. The building of the Pyramids was begun under a favorable star, and when they were completed the king had them covered with colored brocade from top to bottom, and instituted a festival in their honor which was attended by all the people of his realm.

In the Western Pyramid he made thirty treasure chambers, and filled them with abundant wealth, (various) instruments, and images made of exquisite jewels, as well as fine iron tools, rustproof weapons, glass (of such excellent quality) that (it) would bend and yet not break, strange talismans, (various) kinds of simple and compound drugs, deadly poisons, and other things.

(4) Or PHILEMON?

In the Eastern Pyramid he constructed models of the celestial spheres and stars, and (placed there also) the finely wrought images made by his ancestors, as well as the incenses which were offered before them, and the (sacred) books relating to them. In the great colored Pyramid he placed the bodies of the (deceased) priests, (laid out) in coffins of black quartz. With (the body of) each priest was placed his book, recording the miracles which he had wrought and (containing) a general account of his life, the contemporary events, and the past and future happenings, from the beginning of time until its end.

For each Pyramid he made a guardian, the one for the Western Pyramid being an idol of quartz, standing upright and holding a sort of a javelin; around his head was coiled a snake, and if anyone approached the idol, the snake would leap at him, no matter from which direction the man came, and would coil itself around his neck, kill him, and then return to its place.

The guardian of the Eastern Pyramid was an idol of black onyx with brilliant (widely) open eyes, sitting upon a throne and holding a sort of a javelin. If anyone (so much as) looked at him, he would hear such a roar from the direction of the idol, that the man's heart would be seized with terror and he would sink upon his face and be unable to flee, even until he died.

For guardian of the colored Pyramid he made an idol of baht (5) stone, (sitting) upon a pedestal of the same material. If anyone looked at him, the idol would seize him and hug him tightly, and would not release him until he died.

The Copts say in their books that the inscription engraved upon the Pyramids reads thus in Arabic translation : "I, Sawrid the king, have built the Pyramids at such and such a time, and have completed their construction in six years. Whosoever shall come after me and shall (presume to) claim that he is like unto me, let him (try to) demolish them in six hundred years, notwithstanding that it is well known that it is (much) easier to demolish than to build. After completing the Pyramids I have covered them with (costly) brocade—let him (try to) cover them with (cheap) mats."

(5) The baht stone is a kind of stone said to be found in the Atlantic Ocean, and much prized in Western Africa; cf. Dozy, s. v.

When (6) the caliph AL-MA'MŪN (7) entered Egypt and saw the Pyramids, he was seized with the desire to know what was in them, and determined to open them. They said to him, "It is beyond thy power to do that," but he replied, "You must at least open one of them." They thereupon made for him the breach which is still open today. (To do that) they kindled fire, applied acids (8), employed blacksmiths to temper the iron (tools) and sharpen them, and (used) catapults to hurl missiles (against the side of the Pyramid). After a great deal of money was expended upon this (undertaking), the Pyramid was opened, and they found its wall to be twenty cubits thick. When they reached the end of the wall they found behind the breach a green chrysolithe jar (9) containing a thousand (giant) dinars, each dinar weighing an ounce, according to the ounce weight that we use now. They were puzzled at this (find) and could not grasp its meaning, until AL-MA'MŪN said, "Let me have an account of what you have spent to open it." They did so, and behold, it was equal to the amount that they had found, neither more nor less. They also found inside the Pyramid a square well with a square bottom, from which four doors opened into as many chambers containing shrouded corpses. At the top of the Pyramid they found a chamber with a stone sarcophagus (10) containing an idol of malachite, of human shape, inside which was a man ('s corpse) clad in a golden cuirass inlaid with jewels; on his breast lay a priceless sword, and near his head was a precious stone (11) (as large) as an egg and as brilliant as daylight. Upon it (12) was (engraved) an inscription, but no one able to read it could be found.

For years after AL-MA'MŪN had opened the Pyramid, people

(6) According to AL-MAQRIZI, 8, 14, this account is from AL-MAS'ŪDI's *Kitāb akhbār al-zamān* (Universal Chronicle).

(7) AL-MA'MŪN, son of the famous HARŪN AL-RASHĪD, 170/786-218/833. He came down to Egypt to suppress a rebellion early in 217/832.

(8) Literally, vinegar.

(9) Literally, a mithara, or vessel used for ritual ablutions.

(10) Literally, basin, or tank.

(11) The word originally meant a hyacinth, but came to be used for many other stones, such as rubies, sapphires, etc.

(12) It is not certain what the "it" refers to—it may be either the jewel or the idol.

kept entering it and going inside it through the shaft which is in it; some came back safely, others met their death (therein).

Says the author of the "Mirror of Time": One of the wonders of Egypt are the two (great) Pyramids. The width (at the base) of each one of them is five hundred cubits, and the height is just as many cubits; and as the building kept going up their tops became smaller and smaller until (finally) they reached the size of a matting carpet. They are built of marble and bear inscriptions in all the seven (known) scripts, to wit, the Greek, the Hebrew, the Syriac, the Hindu, the Himyarite, the Latin (13), and the Persian. My grandfather told me that *IBN AL-MUNĀWĪ* said: They calculated several times the total land tax (revenue) of the (whole) world, and (found that) it would not be sufficient to (cover the cost of) their demolition. But this, says the author of the "Mirror of Time," is nonsense, for *SALĀH AL-DĪN* (14) ordered (his architects) to take stones from the Pyramids for the building of a dam, a water-reservoir, and a bridge, and they demolished a considerable number of them. One of those who had entered the opened Pyramid, continues the aforementioned author (15), told me that he found in it a tomb (16), branching out into passageways, which often would lead one, by way of canals, (clear) to al-Fayyūm. On the face of it, says this author, it would appear that they are tombs of ancient kings, bearing their names and the secret lore of planets and magic, and other things, but people differ as to him who had built them: some say it was *JOSEPH* (the Patriarch), some say it was *NIMROD*, some say it was the queen *DALŪKA* (17); others, however, say that the Copts had built them before the Deluge, for they knew that it was coming, and transferred their treasures into them; nevertheless, it availed them nothing.

Some of the Egyptian shaykhs say that someone who knew

(13) The word usually means Byzantine, but since the Greek (Ionic) has already been mentioned, it must mean here the Roman, or Latin script.

(14) The gallant ruler of Syria and Egypt, known in the West as Saladin, 532/1138-589/1193.

(15) Rather, according to *AL-MAQRIZI*, 19,4, *ABU ZAYD AL-BALKHI*.

(16) Variant: a well.

(17) This queen is said to have been the successor of the Pharaoh who was drowned in the Red Sea while pursuing the Israelites. Cf. on her, *IBN 'ABD AL-HAKAM*, p. 26f.

the Greek language deciphered one of the scripts engraved upon the Pyramids and found that the inscription read thus (in translation) : " These two Pyramids were built when the Swooping Vulture (18) stood at the sign of the Cancer." This was thirty six thousand years before our Prophet (MUHAMMAD) (according to some), while others make it seventy six thousand years. It is said that the script engraved upon them dates four thousand years before the building of Cairo, and is no longer known to any man.

When AHMAD IBN TÜLÜN (19) became ruler of Egypt, he conducted excavations at the gates of the Pyramids. In (one of) these diggings they found a fragment of coral inscribed with lines of Greek. Someone who knew this (writing) was brought in, and it was found to consist of verses; they were translated and read, in part, thus :

I am he who built the Pyramids all over Egypt,
Their former owner and overseer.
I left in them vestiges of my knowledge and wisdom,
Which, in spite of (the passage of) time, will neither
decay nor become blunt.
In them are abundant treasures and wonderful things,
(Which shall endure) even though time sometimes is tender
(to things) and sometimes destructive.
In them are all the branches of my learning, although
I know beforehand that I shall die, and that they shall
(ultimately) become known (to all).
My secrets shall be opened, and my wonders shall be revealed,
And in the end of time they shall illumine the night.
Eight, and nine, and two, and four,
And seventy after two hundred shall be completed (20);
After this I count (21) ninety (more) periods of time,—
Then the temples shall fall into the river and be destroyed.
Reflect thou upon my deeds, engraved by me in stone,—
They shall remain; I shall perish before them, then they,
too, shall disappear.

(18) The bright star in the constellation of Lyra.

(19) AHMAD IBN TÜLÜN, sultan of Egypt, and founder of the Tulunide dynasty, 220/835-270/884.

(20) The meaning of this cryptic oracle is presumably that 8,924,270 years shall elapse.

(21) Literally, pass.

IBN TÜLÜN thereupon gathered his wise men and asked them to calculate this time, but they were unable to do it accurately; they therefore gave up all hope of opening the Pyramids.

The author of the "Joyful Thoughts" says: The Pyramids situated in the provinces of Egypt are the kind of buildings which do not perish, while time (itself) perishes, and while the guide-posts of time disappear, the fame of the Pyramids does not. There are many of them, but the largest of them are the two at Gizeh, near Cairo. It is said that they were built by SAWRĪD, son of SALHŪF and grandson of SHIRYĀQ, before the Deluge, as a result of a dream which he had had. He told it to the priests, who examined the indications of the luminous stars concerning events about to happen in the world, and having determined their stations at the time of the inquiry, they found that the stars were about to descend from the heavens and surround the face of the earth. The king thereupon gave orders for the building of the temples and the great Pyramids. He engraved upon them the images of the stars, their (positions in) degrees, their actions, secrets, natural properties and laws, and the art of star-gazing. Others (22) say that it was HERMES, he of the triple wisdom (23), called by the JEWS ENOCH (24), and the same person as the blessed IDRIS (25), who deduced from the position of the stars that the Deluge was about to come, and gave orders for the building of the Pyramids and the deposition in them of treasures, books on the sciences, and other valuables which, one might fear, would perish and disappear. Each of the Pyramids has a square foundation and is of gradually tapering shape. Its height vertically is three hundred and seventeen cubits. It is enclosed by four surfaces forming equilateral triangles, each side being four hundred and sixty cubits long. It goes up (into the air) until it (reaches its summit which) is six cubits by six. It is said that on its summit there was (loosely) placed a (round)

(22) Rather, AL-DIMISHQI.

(23) i.e., HERMES TRISMEGISTUS.

(24) The identification of ENOCH with the Thrice-Great HERMES was first made apparently by the Syriac writer BARHEBRAEUS, who seems to have confused HERMES, unwittingly or deliberately, with the Persian HORMUZ.

(25) The Prophet IDRIS appears already in the Koran (XIX, 57; XXI, 85), but his identification with ENOCH is the work of post-Koranic writers. Cf. WENSINCK's article s.v. in the *Enc. of Islam*.

stone shaped like a ball of thread, and although fierce winds continuously pounded at it, yet it was arranged with such superb skill of workmanship, such perfect symmetry, and such fine care, that down to the present time it has never moved, in spite of the fierceness of the winds, the downpours from the clouds, and the shocks of earthquakes. They are so constructed that the layers of cement between the stones (are so excellent in quality that they) look like white cloaks spread (flat) between stones, or (white) sheets (of paper); (the stones are so firmly joined together that) there is not enough of a gap between them to hold a hair (26). Each of their stones is five cubits by two, and it is said that the builder had made for each of the two Pyramids several doors, built over underground vaults made of stone; the length of each vault is twenty cubits, and each door is made of a single stone revolving upon a hinge in such a way that when the door is shut one would not notice that it was there. Each door leads to seven chambers, and each chamber bears the name of a star and is locked with locks. Before each chamber stands a concave idol of gold with one of his hands upon his mouth and with a Himyaritic inscription upon his forehead. When the inscription is read (aloud) his mouth opens and in it is found a key wherewith the lock may be opened.

The Copts say that both the great Pyramids and the colored one are tombs, the Eastern one being the tomb of king SAWRID, the Western one that of his brother HARJIB, and the colored one that of IFRABIYŪN son of HARJIB. The Sabians, however, say that one of the great Pyramids is the tomb of SETH, the other one the tomb of HERMES, and the colored one the tomb of ŠĀB, son of HERMES, after whom the Sabians are named. They make pilgrimages to the latter Pyramid, sacrifice cocks and black calves, and burn incense before it.

When AL-MA'MŪN opened the Pyramid, he struck a narrow shaft, made of black quartz (so hard) that iron (tools) could not work it, between two railings running along the wall. Hollows were chiseled out in the (railings of the) shaft, so that the visitor might take hold of these hollows and enable himself to walk down the shaft without sliding. In the lower part of the shaft

(26) The text is here corrupt; cf. the note to the Arabic text.

is a large and deep well, and they say that at the bottom of the well are doors leading to many places, (such as) chambers, closets, and other wonderful places. At the end of the shaft AL-MA'MŪN's men found a square place in the center of which was a covered basin of granite; whenever they lifted up its lid they found nothing but worn out pieces of rope.

IBN FADL ALLĀH says in his "Paths": People tell many (different) stories about the cause of the building of the Pyramids. Some say they are temples (for the worship) of the stars, some say they are tombs and storehouses for wealth and books, others say they are shelters against the Deluge, which latter is the most improbable of all, for they do not look like living quarters. The Sabians, continues IBN FADL ALLĀH, used to make a full pilgrimage to one of the (two) Pyramids, and (merely) visited the other, which latter they thought to be of far lesser sanctity than the former. As for the "Father of Terror," (27) it is an idol situated in a slight depression near the greater Pyramid. Nothing is seen above the surface of the earth but this idol's head and neck. It bears a Negroid head of terrifying aspect, and its face is covered with red paint, which has not come off in spite of its great age. It is said that it is a talisman which protects the cultivated area against the sand (of the desert). JOSEPH (the Patriarch's) gaol is situated on the left of the Pyramids, some distance from the Sphinx, at the extremity of a mountain pass, at the end of the barrier.

Says the author of the "Joyful Thoughts": In Dahshūr, one of the districts of Gizeh, is a Pyramid built by SHADDĀD, son of 'ĀD, son of ZAWRASHIR, son of NAQTUR, son of MīṣR, the founder of Egypt. Some say, on the authority of 'ABD ALLĀH IBN SHUBRUMA, that when the Amalekites came to Egypt after having been expelled from Mecca by the Jurhumites, they settled there, built the Pyramids, and supplied them with various artifices and wonders; they remained in Egypt until their expulsion by MĀLIK IBN DU'R AL-KHUZĀ'Ī (28).

SA'ID IBN 'UFAYR says: The shaykhs of Egypt keep on saying that the Pyramids were built by SHADDĀD, the son of 'ĀD.

(27) The Arab name for the Sphinx.

(28) Cf. *Enc. of Islam*, s.v. 'Amālik and Djurhum, and the sources listed there.

The Egyptians used to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and whenever anyone of them died, his entire wealth was buried with him; if he was a craftsman, his tools (also) were buried with him.

MUHAMMAD IBN 'ABD ALLĀH IBN 'ABD AL-HAKAM says : From the back of the Pyramids to the West there were four hundred towns, not counting the towns from Cairo westwards, to the West of the Pyramids.

IBN AL-MUTAWWAJ, in his book on the "Wonders of Egypt," says : On the Western shore of Egypt are the structures known as Pyramids, eighteen in all, of which three are in Gizeh, opposite al-Fustāt. When AL-MA'MŪN opened one of them he came upon a sarcophagus covered with a marble tablet and filled with gold. The tablet was covered with lines of writing. They searched for someone who could read it, and (having found him were told that) it read thus : "We built this Pyramid in one thousand days; we shall attach no blame to him who shall demolish it in one thousand years (if he can), notwithstanding that demolishing is (much) easier than building. In each quarter of it we have placed such an amount of wealth as would have to be spent in order to reach it, neither more nor less." Near Madīnat Fir'awn Yūsuf (29) there is another Pyramid, three thousand cubits in perimeter and seven hundred cubits high. Near Madīnat Fir'awn Mūsā (30) there are several Pyramids, one of them known as the Pyramid of Maydūm; it is as large as a mountain and consists of five stories, the upper one having the appearance of a fort on top of a mountain.

AL-ZAMAKHSHARI says : The two Pyramids of Gizeh are situated two parasangs off al-Fustāt. Each one of them is four hundred cubits wide, and its foundation is more than a jarīb (31). They are built of marble slabs, brought over from a place called Dhat al-Hammām, forty parasangs away, beyond Alexandria. They rise so high in the air that their (top has an) area of only five spans by five, and there is no structure on the face of the earth higher than they are. There are engraved upon them, in Himyaritic characters, all sorts of charms, talismans, and

(29) "The city of the Pharaoh of Joseph."

(30) "The city of the Pharaoh of Moses."

(31) A measure of land.

remedies, as well as the following inscription : " I have built them; whoever shall claim that this kingdom is like mine (in greatness), let him demolish them (if he can)." (The fact is) however, that the land tax (revenue) of the whole earth would not be sufficient to pay for their demolition. It is said that no one knows who built them.

AL-MAS'UDI says : The length and width of each of the two Pyramids is four hundred cubits, and their foundation is (the square of) their height. Each contains seven chambers, according to the number of the seven planetary stars, each chamber being under the name of a star and its aegis. At the side of each chamber there was erected a concave golden idol, with one of its hands placed over its mouth, and a hieratic inscription upon its forehead. When the inscription is read (aloud), its mouth opens and a key to the (chamber's) lock comes out. These idols receive(d) their own sacrifices and frankincense, and have spirits assigned to them charged with guarding the chambers, their idols, and their contents, consisting of images, (books on the) sciences, wondrous things, jewels, and (other) treasures. In each Pyramid is (buried) a king('s body), laid in a covered stone sarcophagus, together with a scroll containing his name and his particulars, (all) guarded by talismans, so that no one might reach him until the appointed time shall have come. Some say that the Pyramids contain water courses, through which flows the Nile, and storage tanks holding much water, of corresponding size; and that one of these courses leads to the desert of al-Fayyūm, a distance of two days' journey.

In the days of AHMAD IBN TŪLŪN a company of people entered the great Pyramid and found in one of its chambers a glass cup, of strange color and form. After they had left, they missed one of their number, and reentered (the Pyramid) in search of him. He came out to meet them, naked and laughing, and said : " Do not tire yourself searching for me;" thereupon he fled back into the interior of the Pyramid. They then realized that the evil spirits had taken possession of him. The news of this event spread about, until it reached IBN TŪLŪN, who (forthwith) issued a prohibition against entering (the Pyramid) and took the cup away from the finders. He filled it with water and weighed it; then poured the water out and weighed the cup again, and

behold, its weight both when full and when empty was the same.

It is said that the spirit in charge of the seaward Pyramid has the shape of a naked woman with her private parts uncovered (32) and with her tresses reaching down to the ground. Several people have seen her going round the Pyramid at midday. The spirit in charge of the neighboring Pyramid has the form of a naked, tawny, and beardless youth, and was seen going round the Pyramid after sunset. The spirit in charge of the third Pyramid has the shape of an old man holding a censer and clad in monkish garb; he was seen going around the Pyramid at night. All this (information) is recorded by the author of the "Mirror."

AL-QĀDĪ AL-FĀDIL says : The two Pyramids mark the apex of the earth. All things fear time, excepting the two Pyramids, for time fears them.

Here are some of the poems which deal with the two Pyramids at Gizeh :

AL-MUTANABBĪ says :

Where is he who had constructed, among other buildings,
the Pyramids,

Who are his people, what was his (last) day, how did
he die?

These monuments have outlived their inhabitants

For a while, yet destruction shall (ultimately) overtake
them, too, and they will follow (their builders).

ABŪ AL-SALT UMAYYYA IBN 'ABD AL-'AZĪZ says :

By thy life ! Hast thou seen anything of more beautiful
aspect

Than what thine eyes had seen of the two Pyramids of
Egypt?

They rise (far) into the summit of the sky, and overlook
The ether, just as Vega (32a) overlooks the Lyra.

They reach a lofty height above the earth,
As if they were two breasts standing out over a (woman's)
bosom.

(32) This seeming tautology ("naked"—"uncovered") is explained by the fact that Moslems do not uncover entirely even in bathing, but wear a loin towel through the entire period from undressing for the bath to dressing after it.

(32a) The Arabic term, Simak, is usually translated as Arcturus, which is here astronomically impossible.

The jurist 'UMĀRA AL-YAMANI, the (well-known) poet, says :

O my two friends (33) ! There is no structure under the sky
 That might equal in perfection the two Pyramids of Egypt,—
 (They are) structures of which time is in fear, while all
 That is on the face of the earth fears time.

Says another poet (34) :

Look at the two Pyramids, how they show themselves
 To the eye in their height and loftiness.
 It is as if the wide earth, having
 Become thirsty because of the excessive heat and the
 drouth (35)
 Had uncovered her breasts, and laid them bare,
 Calling upon God to have pity on her children.
 And He has answered her with the Nile, granting her relief
 With copious moisture, thereby relieving her distress.

Says ZĀFIR AL-HADDĀD :

Consider the form of the two Pyramids, and look (at them)
 And (at) the wondrous Father of Terror between them.
 (They are) like unto two squadrons (36) on the march (with
 an interval separating them),
 Or like two lovers with a chaperon between them.
 The waters of the Nile (flowing) between them are like
 (lovers') tears,
 And the howling of the wind around them is like (lovers')
 sobs.
 Between them rises (the hill of) al-Muqāṭtam, resembling
 The (triangular) stirrup of a riding camel, forced to his
 knees by fatigue.
 The (dark) façade of Joseph's gaol looks like a lover
 Left behind (by his beloved), sad and overcome with
 grief.

Says IBN AL-SĀ'ATĪ :

Among the wonders (of the world)—and there are many
 wonders
 That are too great for exaggeration and magnification—

(33) The conventional addressees of the Arab poet's verse.

(34) According to AL-MAQRIZI, 44, 7f., this is 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB IBN AL-HĀJIB.

(35) Literally, ashes.

(36) Or, two camel-litters (so AḥMAD ZAKI PĀSHA, IFA, I, 238, note 3).

Are the two Pyramids. Time decays, its days
 Come to an end, and it adds to the beauty of youth (that
 of old age, while the Pyramids remain forever un-
 changeable).

By God ! Behold the miracle of an eternal building,
 Coveting the sky with the longest reach (on earth).
 It seems to stand in a posture of humility,
 In sorrow for (the passage of) the days and years,
 Concealing from the hearing (of men) the sound of its
 discourse,
 Yet indicating it ('s meaning) clearly to (men's) hearts.

Says SAYF AL-DIN IBN JUBĀRA :

By God ! What a strange and wonderful (spectacle)
 Is presented by the structure of the Pyramids to (men's)
 hearts !
 They conceal from the hearing (of men) the story of their
 people,
 But strip all veils from their (own) wonders.

Another poet says :

It is evident that the land of Egypt has a bosom,
 From which rise the two breasts—meaning the two
 Pyramids.
 What a miracle ! She has given birth to many (men)
 In spite of her old age, and still these breasts stand (as)
 upright (as a young girl's).

When the qādī SHIHĀB AL-DIN FADL ALLĀH made a journey
 to the Pyramids, he wrote to the AMIR AL-JĀ'I (37), the secretary
 (of state), as follows—this was in the year 719 :

I owe (you) the (customary) reward for good news, for
 I have become your neighbor
 In the land of Egypt, and I am not dissatisfied.
 You have sheltered my youth for me in your shade,
 Although you have brought me to the Pyramid (38).

(Your servant) kisses the ground (in humility and joy) and
 praises God for easing his breast in the shade of our Master

(37) The date corresponds to A.D. 1319.

(38) Word-play on the Arabic " haram," which means both Pyramid and
 senility.

and making his desire come true, this desire being (centered in) Egypt, until he found in it the goal of (his) journey. And he established his domicile in it, making the gates thereof face the castle of our Master. He admits (?) that he used to be in too great terror of the sea to set out upon its waves or to travel over its high billows. But the (opportunity of) being near to the service of our Master made him forsake his fear, and he reflected upon the anxiety which overwhelmed him, saying : I am in danger of being drowned, but I fear not the water; it is like sailing a fire-ship which cannot be extinguished, even though (fire) fears running water, and which is no pleasant sight for eyes (of men), except when they perceive the breath of the wind, (which alone may save them from the flames) (39). Then he came upon lakes (40) surrounded by gardens that fill one's eye and caress it with their covering of emerald and melted silver. He concluded his day by settling in our Master's (province of) Gizeh, where men are safe from the vicissitudes of fortune. I finally reached the two Pyramids and perceived from them that these happy days are like newlyweds, and the Pyramids are like festive tents with which (the earth) has adorned herself (for their reception).

DIYĀ' AL-DIN IBN AL-ATHIR says in his epistle, while describing Egypt : I have seen in it cities which, I testify, excell (all) other cities; they consist, I found, of Cairo and the cities beyond it, i.e. (those of) the Sawād. No one could look at them without their filling his eye and breast (with admiration), and no one could (attempt to) describe them without realizing that it is beyond his power to do so. Among their wonders are monuments which cannot be encompassed by (human) eyes, much less so by words. Among them are the two Pyramids, before which time (itself) decays while they decay not. Each one of them is remarkable for the immensity of its construction and the enormity of wealth contained in it. They reach into the air higher than any bird can fly, notwithstanding the (wide) range of its flight, or than

(39) The translation is uncertain, and the text may be corrupt. If the translation is correct, the meaning is that the author had steadfastly faced the dreaded sea-journey, knowing that it would ultimately bring him to his coveted goal, just as the passengers of a burning ship patiently bear their sufferings in the knowledge that the favorable wind will ultimately bring them safely to land.

(40) Literally, pools.

any eye, no matter how farsighted, can penetrate. When a gleam (of lightning) illuminates a Pyramid's tip, it looks to the observer like a star, and when the rainbow curves over it, it seems to serve as the rainbow's arrow.

Our teacher AL-SHIHĀB AL-MANŞŪRĪ says :

When passing by the two Pyramids, say : How many lessons
Are there in them for him who understands and considers
(them) !

I liken each one of them unto a traveler
Who recognizes his goal (41), but camps (a distance)
before it (42);
Or unto two lovers, whose reunion is prevented by the
Father of
Terror acting as a chaperon, and who (therefore) leave
him behind;
Or unto two thirsty men who had prayed to a moisture
laden cloud for rain,
And it poured for them sweet water in ample bounty (43).
Time (itself) perishes (before them), and in its fear of them
There is the anger of envy and the vexation of one who
realizes his impotence.

Says an anonymous poet quoted by the author of the “ Interpreter ” :

When kings desire to make (permanent) their memory after
their death,
They think of firmly founded buildings.
Do they (44) not see the two Pyramids that have been built,
and yet how many are
The kings (who had built them), who(se memory) was
protected against the vicissitudes of time?
(And yet) verily a magnificently constructed building
Is in itself an indication of a mighty builder (even if his
name has been forgotten).

(41) i.e., the river Nile.

(42) To prolong the pleasure at reaching his destination; an allusion to the fact that the Pyramids are a distance inland from the river bank.

(43) Allusion to the interval between the two Pyramids, which the poet compares with a ravine produced by a rushing current of rain water between two mountains.

(44) The text has the singular “ does he not,” which is a poetic license used for the sake of the metre.

This is the end of the epistle entitled “ Delight of the noble concerning the Pyramids.” God (alone) knows best the truth (about them), and to Him do we return in repentance (for our sins and omissions). This epistle is by the shaykh JALĀL AL-DĪN AL-SUYŪTĪ,—may God in His mercy give him His blessings. Amen.

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